

### **Slavery in the Eyes of a Former Slave**

In *The Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, Douglass represents the true struggle that every slave at that time went through. Douglass's memoir gave a discernible look at the everyday life of slaves, and the brutal realities the slaves faced: men, women, and children alike. This biography also shines a light on the slave owners and their view of the slaves they own. Douglass created a vivid picture of the lack of freedom and the demoralizing acts slave owners showed towards their slaves that showed power and created a sense of inadequacy within their slaves.

One of the first ways we see a slave being abused is not physical but emotional. Slaves did not get to know certain information and skills as they grew up. This in turn made the slaves feel less like a human and more like what Douglass quoted as a "brute." Slaves never knew information about their age; this showed children the difference between white and black. Slaves became separated from their mothers at a young age and sent to live with a woman slave that raised any children born on the plantation. Mothers had to be moved to another field, making slaves not have the opportunity to learn what the feeling of attachment or affection should feel like. They learned from the beginning slaves survived on the same level of the other animals that worked in the fields. Slaves also did not learn to read, because masters saw this as a way to escape and earn freedom.

The goal of a slave owner had been to make the slaves feel valueless and no better than another piece of cattle on the plantation. Douglass shared when his master Captain Anthony passed away, all slaves had to be sent back to the property to be valued. Captain Anthony's children made it clear the ranking slaves had when all slaves no matter what age or sex lined up next to the cattle and divided on the same scale. Many slaves never saw their friends and family again. Douglass quoted, "At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slave holder."

Much of Douglass's narrative displays the life of the slave, but several instances showed the parallel attitude and behavior between all slave owners and their slaves. Slave owners became very cold hearted and acted very inhumane towards their slaves. An example could be the amount of food and clothing rations slaves received. Men and women received just enough food to survive and the bare minimum in clothing to last the entire year. Children did not get shoes or jackets until the appropriate working age. They could be seen year round nearly naked. When Douglass moved to the Auld's, he exposed the effects of what owning a slave does to a slave owner. At first, his mistress seemed kind hearted towards slaves, homeless, and the hungry; she even started teaching Douglass to read. After her husband scolded her for this, Mrs. Auld changed her whole demeanor towards Douglass and any like him. She became a grim slave holder like her husband and every other slave master. Slave owners turned to heartless humans that would not think twice before whipping a slave because they spoke too loud or had a certain look in their eye.

Women, men, young, and old received whatever means of torture the master thought warranted for the crimes they allegedly committed. The first time Douglass saw the unjustifiable whipping happened with his own Aunt Hester. His aunt had not disobeyed any rules, but found she had committed a supreme offense according to her master. To teach her a lesson and to show the masters power over his slaves, Captain Anthony made Douglass's aunt stand on her tip toes on a stool and be tied and hooked on a pole above her head and whipped on her bare skin until the blood covered the floor. Douglass saw the ugly realities of the unfair treatment of slavery many times after this. He realized at that point that he had entered "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery."

When Douglass went to live with Mr. Covey, this seemed like the hardest time in his life. Douglass by this time had had several masters that treated him very badly, but not like Mr. Covey. Up until that point he still had that "natural elasticity" and "cheerful spark in his eyes" as Douglass described. He still had the desire to learn to read and one day escape and become a free man. After a few months though Mr. Covey had broke him like he had done with many slaves before him. Douglass worked hard in all seasons and weather conditions. Mr. Covey played many mind games with his slaves. They never knew when their master would pop up from behind a fence to catch a slave not working. Mr. Covey's goal to deceive his slaves made them constantly wonder when he would be in the field with them. This made the slaves work without break in the long hours of the day and into the night. On Sundays, Douglass spent his time laying beneath a tree in the shade. He would briefly think about freedom and his desire to learn more, but soon those thoughts would disappear.

"You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man", It can be seen through Douglass's quote that he in the end did not live his days out as a slave. He escaped from the clutches of slavery and began a new life as a free man. Escaping the south was just the beginning of this. Douglass also overcame the mental conflict within himself that told him that he will never be completely free and equal to the white man that worked beside him. Douglass being very wise and intelligent though in time overcame these conflicts.